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POLICY TITLE: Academic Unit Review and Policy Procedures  
CATEGORY: Academic  
OWNER: Academic  
APPROVED BY: Academic Council  
APPROVED DATE: November 24, 2021  
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## Introduction

The fundamental purpose of academic unit reviews is to provide information, both qualitative and quantitative, and recommendations that can serve as a basis for innovation and improvement. Reviews should identify strengths and weaknesses, stimulating program development and revision. In a broad sense, the reviews will lead to more focused planning to address teaching and supervision, research opportunities, and unit infrastructure and administration.

Academic unit reviews are at the program level. As a key academic unit, the Library will also undergo academic unit reviews.

These reviews will focus on the following areas:

- the priorities and aspirations of each unit and the extent to which they are being realized
- the challenges and opportunities faced by the unit
- the structure and quality of undergraduate and graduate programs and instruction
- the contribution of each program to related disciplines and fields of study
- the scope and significance of research being pursued
- the degree to which academic programs meet students' learning needs and goals
- the characteristics of staffing complements
- the degree to which the unit is meeting its internal and external service responsibilities
- the role the unit plays in meeting the University's vision, mission, goals and priorities
- the financial resources of the unit

## **Academic Unit Review Committee**

The Academic Unit Review Committee (AURC) is a subcommittee of the Academic Council. The AURC is responsible for managing the review process as outlined in the *Academic Unit Review Policy and Procedures* document. The recommendations of the AURC, on the basis of the review process, are advisory, and are submitted to the Vice-President Academic for further action. Members of the AURC are the Associate Deans and four tenured or tenure-track faculty members.

## **Review Coordination**

The coordination of all unit reviews is the responsibility of the Vice President, Academic's Office working in partnership with FNUiv Academic Unit Review Committee (AURC), and the unit under review. The recommendations that are the outcome of the review process are advisory. Specifically, the Vice-President Academic's Office and AURC will:

- In consultation with Academic Council, develop a schedule for reviews;
- Receive, review and comment on the self-study report;
- Appoint the review team;
- Develop terms of reference for the review team;
- Receive and transmit the report of the review team;
- Meet with the Program Coordinator to discuss the report and the unit's response;
- Receive the unit's implementation plan;
- Report regularly to Board of Governors and Elder's Council on the status of reviews; and
- Identify issues of university-wide concern and make recommendations concerning them to appropriate bodies or individuals.

## **Consequences for Noncompliance**

Academic units that do not engage in the cycle of Academic Unit Review will not contribute to the University's continued pursuit of improvement in programming. Ongoing disregard of the need for program review will impact the University's long-term viability.

## **Review Procedures**

### *Initiation*

Reviews take place in the framework of a 10-year cycle. Where applicable, unit reviews should be scheduled to coincide with (re-)accreditation, and with the review or 5-year update of closely related units. Should a program undergoing external (re-)accreditation wish to use the (re-)accreditation process to replace part or all of an Academic Unit Review, the Faculty or unit is invited to consult with Vice-President Academic about the possibility of doing so.

Year 1- Initiation ® Review ® Year 5 – 5 Year Update ® Year 10 – New Review.  
The review cycle will be established in October of each year.

### *Review Time Frame*

The review process typically spans a 12-month period as indicated below. The responsibilities of the Vice President Academic's Office and the unit under review are indicated.

### *Unit Self-Study*

All members of the unit should have a voice in the preparation of the self-study. The self-study addresses such aspects as the history, current status, pending changes, budget, future prospects and opportunities of the unit. Strengths and limitations of the program(s) under review need critical examination. Although the procedures are for the members of the unit to determine, as many as possible should participate in examining pending changes and future prospects and opportunities.

The most successful reviews are assisted by self-study reports that are clearly written, and complete but concise. The quality of the self-study report is enhanced if a small steering group is responsible for its preparation and drafts are circulated to all members for comment. In general, the focus for the self-study should be a frank and balanced consideration of both strengths and areas for improvement, and strategies for future change. It is also essential that the self-study take into consideration the larger institutional issues and the vision, mission, goals and priorities of the University. The result of the self-study is a report that serves as a primary document for the external unit review team.

A template for the unit self-study will be shared by the Vice President Academic's Office. The template contains the following categories:

- a. Background – a brief description of the unit, including history and structure;
- b. Staffing, resources, and space;
- c. Research and creative output – published scholarly output and/or professional creative activity over the last ten years, with an emphasis on the impact of that scholarship/activity;
- d. Community service initiatives – community service initiatives carried out by the unit or its members;
- e. Academic programs, including service teaching, enrolment trends, and student successes;
- f. Program Unit budget; and
- g. SWOT analysis – unit strengths, weakness, opportunities, threats.

The report should also contain a profile of the academic staff in an appendix to the main body of the self-study report. It is highly recommended that the members adopt a uniform and brief format that summarizes the important information from each member's curriculum vitae.

Self-studies will be augmented by data from the Institutional Resource Planner including enrolments, teaching credit hours, grants and contracts, budget, staff and faculty numbers. Links will be provided to additional material such as FNUUniv planning documents, budgets, and calendars. The goal is to provide reviewers with sufficient information to have a broad understanding both of the unit and the context in which it operates. (In the case of the Library, alternate data and information will be necessary.)

The Vice President Academic's Office and AURC will convene a meeting with the Program under review to discuss procedural and resources for each self-study. The self-study output is shared with the Review Team, the U of R Provost's Office, and the CCAM.

#### *Review Team Selection*

Members of the review team should be chosen to avoid any appearance of conflict of interest (see [www.FNUUniv.ca/about-us/policies](http://www.FNUUniv.ca/about-us/policies)). Typically, the review team will consist of three members. Two of these, including the chair, will be well-respected, impartial experts in the particular discipline or area, chosen from other universities. The other member will be chosen from a closely related discipline or area at the FNUUniv.

The composition of the review team is vital to the review's success. Team members must have credibility both inside and outside the unit under review. The unit is requested to submit six external and two internal review team nominees to the Vice President's Office. A brief statement of rationale for the external nominees must accompany the submission.

#### **Terms of Reference**

The expectation of the review team is that they will provide an opinion about the strengths and weaknesses of the unit's teaching, research and service programs. This will include an assessment of the numbers and diversity of academic and non-academic staff and their responsibilities, the resources provided, the effectiveness of the unit's organization, the quality of the working environment, the relations of the unit to others, the quality of educational opportunities provided to students—both graduate and undergraduate, and the effectiveness of the evaluation methods used to gauge student and program success. The review team is expected to offer recommendations for improvement and innovation.

As members of a research institution, our faculty and students are expected to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in their particular field of study. It is essential that the review team provide an assessment of the quality of the research and scholarly activities of the program, and the effectiveness of the relationships between teaching and research, particularly at the graduate level.

In addition, the Vice President Academic, Associate Deans, and the faculty of the unit under review will identify specific issues to be addressed by the review team.

### **Site Visit**

The review team will meet at the University for an appropriate period of time, normally two days, and prepare a comprehensive report on the unit reviewed. In preparing the report, the team will consult widely with academic and administrative staff, students, administrators and alumni involved with the programs and activities of the unit under review.

Typically, the review team's time will provide opportunities for consultation within the academic unit (faculty, staff and students); FNUUniv Elder's Council, members of the University administration; and other individuals inside and outside of the University who influence or who are influenced by the activities of the unit and graduates of the program. The review team will also meet with the relevant UofR Dean, Assoc. Dean and/or Department Head and input will be sought from the relevant UofR unit. Particular efforts must be made to ensure student participation. The on-site consultations commence with a working dinner hosted by the FNUUniv administration and an Elder, and end with an exit interview with the Vice President Academic and the Program Coordinator of the unit under review.

The visit of the review team is to be advertised widely to the FNUUniv community with an invitation for those who have an interest in the program(s) to contribute a written brief to the team, which is normally submitted to the Vice President Academic, prior to an advertised date. Such briefs are for use by the review team and will be held in confidence by the team.

The schedule of interviews during the visit will be developed by the unit under review with appropriate input from the Vice President Academic's Office.

### **Report**

While the team prepares the report, the Vice President Academic, Associate Deans and Program Coordinators will be available to provide any additional information requested. The findings and recommendations of the review team should be presented in the form of a concise written report (with an executive summary) which will be received by the Vice President Academic's Office. Provided that matters of individual sensitivity or confidentiality are handled with appropriate discretion, the report (in its entirety) will be made publicly available on the academic unit review webpage, as will the unit's response to the report. FNUUniv will share the report with the UofR's Provost and Vice-President (Academic) as well as with the Council Committee for Academic Mission (CCAM), and the Dean of the Faculty under review.

**Response and Implementation**

On receipt of the report, the members of the unit will meet in committee for discussion. Based on the report, the unit will then prepare a response. The response will address the issues raised and clearly outline priorities and future directions and initiatives for the unit over the next three to five years. As such, it should be prepared in close partnership with the Vice-President Academic. The Vice-President Academic and unit head will provide a formal written response to the report from the unit and share this response with the UofR's Provost and Vice-President (Academic), the CCAM and the Dean of the Faculty under review. The unit head and Vice-President Academic will also meet with CCAM for a 15-18 month follow-up to discuss the progress on the implementation of the review team's recommendations. At the five-year timeline, the unit head and Vice-President Academic also meet with CCAM to present the final update on the implementation and outcome of the review report's recommendations.

**Follow-up**

Five years after the review (and mid-way before the next review), the Vice President Academic's Office will initiate a follow-up with the unit. The unit will be invited to prepare and submit a brief report in which members of the unit comment on the consequences of the review and initiatives undertaken in response to it and respond to any comments from Vice President Academic. In particular, they will be asked to describe initiatives and plans for the coming three to five years until the next review takes place.